

# REAL ROMANCES OF THE BUSINESS WORLD AFTER 25 YEARS

BY RICHARD SPILLANE.

They came to the back door of a beautiful home in Schenectady one bright afternoon a boy of sixteen who asked if there was any work he might do. It was the maid's day off and the lady of the house, Mrs. Gerald, answered the ring of the bell. The boy looked so downcast when she told him there was no work to do, no odd job to do, no odd job to do, that her kindly, sympathetic heart was touched.

"Would you like something to eat?" she inquired.

"Not unless I can work for it," the boy answered rather doggedly.

Mrs. Gerald was not accustomed to that sort of response from back door visitors, and was a bit perplexed. She looked at the lad keenly and then she came to her. "Boy," she said, "I am sure you are hungry. I'll fix up something for you to eat and you can come back some other time and do the work."

The boy thanked her, but shook his head. He could not come back, he said, because he would be going away this night of next morning.

"Don't you live here in Schenectady?" she inquired.

"No," he said, and then she asked what in the world a boy of his age was doing in a strange city. He said he was on his way to Buffalo. He had come from a town in Eastern Massachusetts.

"And how did you get here?" she asked.

Most of the distance, he told her, he had walked. Part of the way he had ridden on freight trains.

"Did you come into Schenectady on a freight train?" she asked.

"No," he answered, "I walked from Albany here to-day."

"Why, child," she exclaimed, "it is a wonder you are not dead. The earth was muddy from the spring thaws. Next she looked intently at the lad. His clothes showed the signs of wear, but were neat, and his shoes were clean."

"You say you walked from Albany to-day?" she repeated.

"Yes," he answered, "it's a long way."

The lines tightened a little about Mrs. Gerald's mouth and she looked as stern as it was possible for so sweet and soft-hearted a woman to appear, but not for long. She studied the boy's face as she looked at him. There was a touch of sadness, too, and there was a look of earnestness, a strong appeal. She sighed, and then telling him there was no good in his offering objection, for he must do as she ordered, she made him sit down. In a few minutes she had cooked some eggs and bacon, made some coffee, and the lad, after a vain protestation, began to eat. When he finished eating she questioned him further. He was efficient and

it required some time to get his story from him, but finally she had it.

His mother was dead—had died five or six years before. His father, a German, had married a second time, and the stepmother came to hate her stepson. Between the father and the son there had been only a cold attachment, and this, through the stepmother's influence, not only had been destroyed, but the father became embittered against him. Beatings were frequent, reproaches were constant, and at last the boy had left home. He had an uncle in Buffalo whom he had never seen, but he knew he would be welcomed, for the uncle was his mother's brother, and besides the boy was handy with tools, and the uncle, who was a cabinetmaker, could use him.

Mrs. Gerald could understand it now. The beatings and stepmother accounted for what was ailing in the lad's face. The memory of his mother, mention of whom brought a mist to his eyes, explained the settled sadness.

Mrs. Gerald always was impulsive, and never more so than when her sympathies were aroused. She also was most positive. She told the boy it was unthinkable that he should travel as he had been doing. He would have to remain in Schenectady until he earned enough money to pay his way to Buffalo. She could get work for him. She felt sure of it. Schenectady was a busy city. It had locomotive works, electrical works, agricultural implements, manufacturing and other industries. She had friends who were large employers of labor and she would ask one of them to find a place for him. She would see one of them that night. Meanwhile the boy had better go to Elizabeth, Eliza formerly had been Mrs. Gerald's cook. Now she was married and keeping a boarding house. It was not until Mrs. Gerald had paper and envelope and was on the second line of her note that she had to stop. And when she stopped she laughed.

"I've been talking to you for nearly half an hour," she said, "and here I am writing a note to Eliza and I don't know your name."

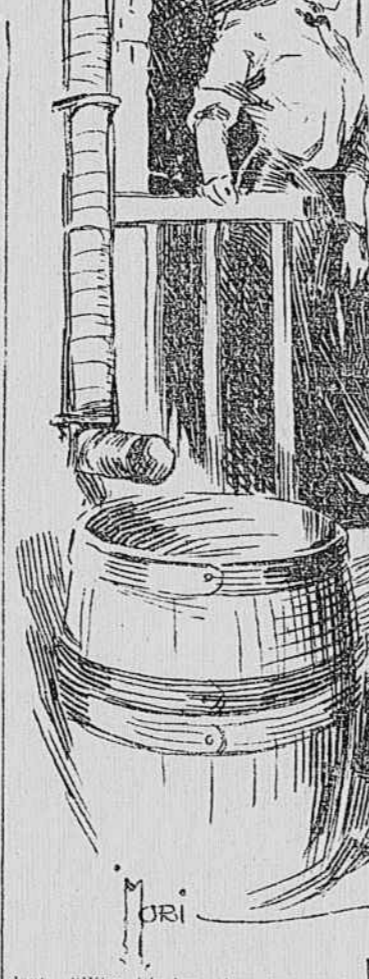
"William Shafer," said the boy.

That night the superintendent of the electrical works was one of the guests at dinner at Mrs. Gerald's. He and Mrs. Gerald had been friends from childhood. "Edward," she said, "will you do me a favor?"

"Delighted to," he laughingly replied, "if it's a simple thing like giving a hundred to the church, but most emphatically 'no' if you want me to take back Jim Towers or Pat Gleason or some other periodical. Who's been working you now?"

"Now, that is mean of you, Edward, to talk that way," Mrs. Gerald declared. "I haven't asked a favor of you in ages."

"Ages!" exclaimed the superintendent.



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ed in his work and that he wanted to learn all he could about the business. She explained how narrow was his opportunity for advancement if he confined himself to the routine work of the shop. He must know the business not only from the practical, but the theoretical end.

This was the age of electricity. It offered wonderful chances to those who succeeded. One great essential to success in any branch of endeavor was education. He could learn much if he progressed faster than he knew. It might seem difficult at first and he might despair at times, but nothing was beyond the power of an earnest man. Next she suggested that, small as his wages were, he should save something. She inquired into his expenses and told him if he wanted to put aside 25 cents a week or fifty cents a week she would arrange for him to open an account at one of the banks. The possession of money would inspire a feeling of confidence and self-reliance that would be worth much to him, but far greater would be the spirit of thrift that would be instilled in him.

At the Gerald dinner gatherings Mrs. Gerald's protegee was the staple joke. "What's the latest news about the boy tramp?" one of the men would be certain to ask some time in the evening.

"He was here yesterday," Mrs. Gerald replied one evening. "He had bought a suit of clothes and came to show it."

"And he has opened a bank account and is going to night school," she added.

It was a month or two later that the superintendent, who dined regularly once a week at the Gerald's, remarked casually to Mrs. Gerald: "I saw that boy tramp of yours to-day, Martha. I was talking with the foreman of the pattern room and happened to notice him. I asked the foreman how he was getting on, and he said the boy worked faithfully enough, but was a sullen, obstinate little brat—a regular mule. I guess he'll get fired before long."

Mrs. Gerald sent for the youngster and had a long talk with him. She was tactful and a wonderful skill in presenting any case in which she was interested deeply. She explained to the boy how he appeared to others, and how he added them in misjudging him. She told how great a thing will power is, and how valuable it is when properly employed, but how closely allied it is to obstinacy. She said his character was just forming, and what sort of a man he was to be would be determined by what measure of self-control he practiced. To obey the orders of his superiors was most important. To do otherwise was almost as necessary as to do well. He must overcome the bitterness, the sullenness that has come upon him through the injustice and mistreatment of his father and stepmother. It was another life he had entered now. Whether it should be one of brightness and happiness or one of gloom and opposition rested with himself. Out of her own ardent imagination she drew a picture of what he might do if he but tried, and then she told him it was his duty to himself and to her that he should do so.

The statement that it was his duty to her seemed to impress the boy more than anything else. "You are the only one who has been kind to me since my mother died," he said, "and I'll do everything you ask me."

A few days later he reported how he had been ordered to do something he did not approve. The order had come from a man he disliked, but under whom he was working. He did not want to do it and refused. Then he thought of all she had said, and he had forced himself not only to do it, but to smile in doing it. He had surprised the man by his change of attitude, and the man had scoffed and sneered at him because he had thought he had mastered the spirit of the obstinate youth, never imagining, of course, the real cause.

Mrs. Gerald was delighted. She told the boy he had won a victory and that if he would be steadfast there would be less and less difficulty in overcoming his great fault. Soon a time would come when what now was a hindrance would disappear. Then she told him he must study. There was a night school to which she advised him to go. She had learned that he delight-



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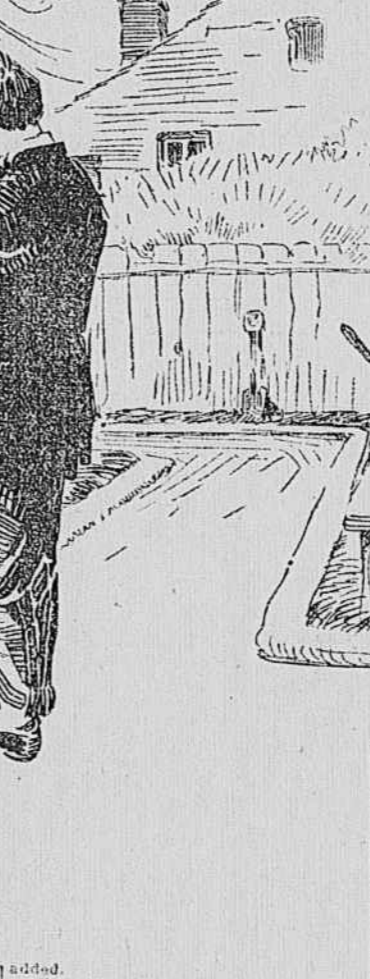
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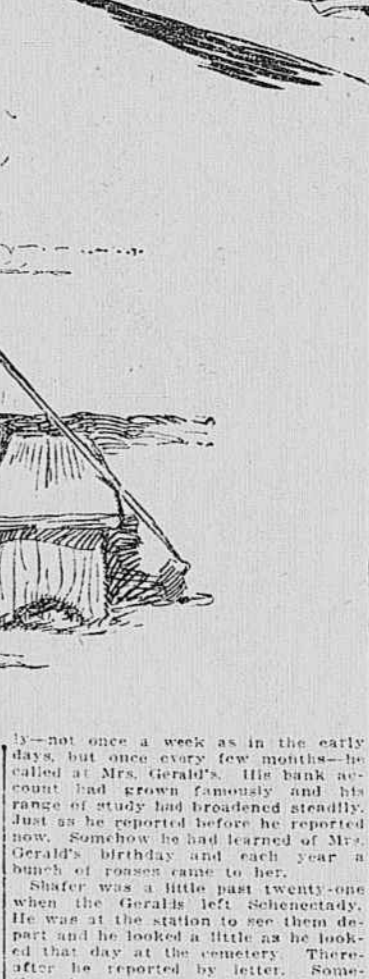
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had come to her every time she met him. And every time her thought reverted to him she sighed. Schenectady long had ceased to be her home and her brown hair long since had turned to silver, when a friend of her childhood, a woman who had lived next door to her in the old town, came to visit her in New York.

They were sitting in the library after their first greetings, when the visitor said: "Oh, Martha, I must tell you the great news about William Shafer."

Mrs. Gerald smiled. "I think I know it. I had a letter."

"You don't mean that he still reports to you?" exclaimed Mrs. Gerald.

"Always," replied Mrs. Gerald.

"Why, I never heard of such a case before," said the visitor. "Isn't it marvelous? Isn't it marvelous that the boy who came to Schenectady as he did should now be appointed general manager of all the Western territory of the company? Martha, you ought to be very proud. Think of the hundreds of men we know who started so well and who had every advantage, and who had done so little. And it seems such a short time, although it is so many years. Why, I can recall, as if it were yesterday, the time he came to Schenectady. I don't know whether you know it, but he came to our house before he went to yours. He chopped some wood for us, and when I paid him I had to smile at the odd request he made. He was all mud, and when he asked me if I would please let him have a brush to clean his shoes—why! Martha, what is the matter?"

Mrs. Gerald had risen. Her face was aglow and her arms were outstretched. "Oh," she cried, "I am so happy. I think—I think this is the happiest day of my life. But why, oh why, didn't you tell me this before. In all the joy, in all the pride I have felt in William Shafer's success, there has been one sorrow. That day when a poor hungry little boy, he came to our back door and he told me he had walked all the way from Albany. I looked out of the window and I looked at him. It was spring, you know, and the roads were muddy from the thaw. I looked at his clothes and I looked at his shoes. His shoes were clean. For a moment I felt as if I should turn him off, for there was evidence that he told a lie. But I didn't have the heart to turn him away. When he told me his story I determined to help him, even if he had told the truth to me. Never since then have I been able to get that one thing out of my mind when I have seen him or thought of him. It has been the one blot on it all. A thousand times I have asked myself why he told me such a false hood, why the picture of him should not be perfect, for, you know, it is one of the greatest pleasures of my life to know that I had so much to do in molding his character. But always there was the thought of those seven, ten or eighteen miles of muddy road—and those clean shoes."

"And now—and now after twenty-five years I know for the first time that he told the truth. It came to her every time she heard from Shafer, and it

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Dr. Caldwell does not feel that the purchase of his remedy ends his obligation. He has specialized in stomach, liver and bowel diseases for over forty years, and will be pleased to give the reader any advice on the subject free of charge. All are welcome to write him. Whether for the medical advice or the free sample address him Dr. W. B. Caldwell, 511 Caldwell Building, Monticello, Ill.

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